

PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU

TEXT OF THE UNION FINANCE MINISTER PRANAB MUKHERJEE'S ADDRESS AT UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO ON ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SWAMI VIVEKANAND CHAIR

28th January, 2012

I feel honoured to be present here at this world famous University of Chicago, to mark the beginning of very fruitful chapter in our cooperation. We have just witnessed the signing of a MoU for setting up of the Indian Ministry of Culture Swami Vivekananda Chair that will establish a visiting professorship in the field of Indian studies. It was the decision of our National Committee headed by the Prime Minister to commemorate the 150th Birth Anniversary of one of India's greatest souls, Swami Vivekananda, at the city of Chicago, where he delivered his stirring address in 1893. The National Implementation Committee, that I chair, took up several options and decided unanimously that the proposal of the University of Chicago, that has the distinction of being one of the great centres of learning, would be the most befitting to enshrine the universal values that Swami Vivekananda professed.

2. Swami Vivekananda came to Chicago in 1893 to attend the World Parliament of Religions as a representative of Hinduism and India, and it is here that he quoted from the 'Bhagvad Gita': **“Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me. Sectarianism, bigotry, and it's**

horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization, and sent whole nations to despair.” This universal message is time-invariant; it is as relevant today as it was over 100 years ago.

3. The terror that was let loose on 11th September, 2001 on the soil of this nation has only served to tragically underline these words spoken by Swami Vivekananda also on 11th September in 1893, in this very city of Chicago. It is relevant to note that Vivekananda had also said, **“...I fervently hope that the bell that has tolled this morning in honour of the Convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or the pen, and of all uncharitable feeling between persons wending their way to the same goal.”**

4. His goal was to help each individual to grow, to manifest her inner potential, according to her own line of development. As Swamiji put it: **“All the men and women in any society are not of the same mind, capacity, or of the same power to do things; they must have different ideals, and we have no right to sneer any ideal.”**

5. Swami Vivekananda came to these shores with the message of the unity of all humanity : **“If you go below the surface, you find that Unity between man and man, between races and races, high and low, rich and poor, gods and men, and men and animals. If you go deep enough, all will be seen as only variations of the One; and he who has attained to this conception of Oneness has no more delusion.”**

6. Swami Vivekananda made a powerful impact upon the American psyche in the last decade of the nineteenth century. He conversed with eminent philosophers, scientists, inventors, entrepreneurs, priests and thousands of ordinary people, men and women from all walks of life and all strata of society. All the time he was both teaching and learning. The great interest in the spiritual traditions of the East that we see in the West today is in substantive measures directly attributable to Swami Vivekananda. Teachers of the rich and varied spiritual schools of Hinduism and Buddhism who came and taught in America over the past hundred years have only followed in the footsteps of the pioneer, Vivekananda.

7. He was intensely pained at the caste discrimination prevalent in India and was all sympathy for the poor and suffering of all nations, castes and creeds. He held the neglect of the masses and the subjugation of women to be the two causes of India's downfall. He said to his disciple, Sister Nivedita, **"Never forget it, the word is, women and the people."**

8. Christopher Isherwood held Vivekananda to be **"...one of the very greatest historical figures that India has ever produced...Vivekananda looked toward the West, not simply as a mass of tyrants exploiting various parts of Asia...but as future partners, people who had very, very much to offer."**

9. Swami Vivekananda loved America and Americans in particular. On 19th September, 1893, he concluded his paper on Hinduism with a stirring tribute to America: **"Hail Columbia, motherland of liberty! It has been given to thee, who never dipped her hand in her neighbor's blood,**

who never found out that the shortest way of becoming rich was by robbing one's neighbours, it has been given to thee to march at the vanguard of civilization with the flag of harmony."

10. Swami Vivekananda did not live to see forty. Barely ten years after he spoke in Chicago, he was gone - in 1902, on the fourth of July, the Independence Day of a nation he had come to love. He passed away in the monastery in Belur, near Kolkata, on the bank of the river Ganga. He appeared like a blazing comet across the sky of our life, full of brilliance and hope for all humanity. He promised to remain '**a voice without a form inspiring men everywhere**' and for all times to come. Let us all listen to his voice till we too become dwellers in the realm of light that was his vision.

11. The Indian Government is extremely happy in giving an endowment of US\$ 1.5 million to the University of Chicago, for establishing the Swami Vivekananda Chair. The activities that would be undertaken under this Chair would focus on Vivekananda, through lectures, seminars and suitable related academic activities on Indian Culture and Indian Studies.

12. The Swami Vivekananda Chair will be held by each scholar for a period of two years. The University of Chicago will also facilitate exchange of research scholars from and to India between both the parties i.e. the University of Chicago and the Government of India.

13. We sincerely hope that this Vivekananda Chair will promote an ongoing study of the cultures and way of life of the peoples of these two

great democracies, so that our two countries understand each other better and come closer together. This permanent endowment will help spread the message of harmony of religions, understanding between nations and the spiritual oneness of humanity, which Swami Vivekananda worked for.

14. Before I conclude I would like to thank Dean Martha Roth for facilitating the setting up this Chair in the honour of a great son of India and his world vision. I would also like to thank Dr. Robert Zimmer, President of University of Chicago for his leadership and vision in taking this step to strengthen this historical relationship with India. And finally to the Indian community in Chicago who have contributed to sustain the goodwill between our two nations.

Thank you

The Chicago University's Vivekananda Chair:

Earlier, an Agreement for creation of "The Indian Ministry of Culture Vivekananda Chair" was signed between Ministry of Culture, Government of India and University of Chicago in the presence of the Union Finance Minister Shri Mukherjee in Chicago today during his Chicago visit. The salient features of this Agreement are:-

- In consideration of a grant of US\$ 1.5 million for creation of an endowment, the University of Chicago will establish "The Indian Ministry of Culture Vivekananda Chair" to honour the life & legacy of Swami Vivekananda by promoting fields of study most relevant to his teachings.

- The University of Chicago will identify and send to Government of India dossiers of two or three candidates who possess a demonstrated record of scholarly excellence and whose work epitomizes the legacy of Swami Vivekananda.
- The University of Chicago will take into an account the feedback from the Government of India before making its final selection from the pool of selected candidates.
- The Swami Vivekananda Chair will be held by each scholar ideally for a period of 2 years.
- The Chair who will be filled a senior scholar of significant academic distinction in a field of study promoted by Swami Vivekananda. He/she will remain in residence for one or more quarters of the academic year to teach, conduct research, and engage with the intellectual community of the University.
- Each year, the holder of the Swami Vivekananda Chair will also make a public Presentation on a topic that exemplifies, honours, and promotes the legacy of Swami Vivekananda.

The said Presentation will be scheduled and organized in coordination with the office of Consul General of India at Chicago. Each such event will be a public celebration of the partnership between the University of Chicago and the Government of India and an enduring commemoration of Swami Vivekananda's indelible mark on the City of Chicago.

- University of Chicago will give wide publicity to the establishment of the said "*The Indian Ministry of Culture Vivekananda Chair*" as

part of commemoration of 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda and such publicity will also be displayed prominently in the University. The University will display the title of the Chair in all appropriate materials, print and electronic media wherever such Chairs are promoted and publicized.

- All the expenses connected with the creation and operation of the Chair like salary, cost of travel, accommodation, annual presentation etc. will be met from the interest income generated from the endowment grant of US\$ 1.5 million. The University of Chicago will be responsible for maintaining separate accounts for the principal account, expenditure and income.
- The University of Chicago will also facilitate exchange of research scholars from/ to India between both the parties i.e. University of Chicago and Government of India.

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